A League of Their Own : The Soviet Origins of the United Nations

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A League of Their Own:
The Soviet Origins of the United Nations

The Soviet contribution to the origins of the United Nations is an under-explored topic in mainstream histories of the UN. Mark Mazower, for example, depicts the UN as primarily an Anglo-American creation, with the Soviet Union playing at best a secondary part in the process. After the war, writes Mazower, the Soviets had "serious second thoughts about the UN" which reflected their "lack of interest in the whole world organisation idea" and the priority they assigned to the preservation of state sovereignty.[1]

An examination of the negotiations to establish the UN from the Soviet perspective reveals a somewhat different picture. Far from being unimportant to Moscow, the creation of a successor to the League of Nations was a central preoccupation of Soviet postwar peace planners. As Stalin told Churchill and Roosevelt at Yalta, the Big Three had to create an international security organisation that would keep the peace for 50 years.

Stalin's perspective on postwar security was linked to his preference for a punitive peace that would permanently weaken Germany and Japan – states which he believed could threaten world peace again. Hence the wartime coalition of Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union had to be transformed into a peacetime grand alliance, and the United Nations was seen as a crucial institutional form of that alliance. A common interest in the containment of German and Japanese militarism was the objective basis for postwar collaboration, while the broadly positive wartime experience of coalition with the British and Americans boded well for the future of the grand alliance.[2]

The Soviet role in birthing the UN was also shaped by Moscow's experience of the League of Nations. Viewing the League's failure to avert the Second World War as the result of great power disunity and weakness in the face of aggression, the Soviets strove for a successor

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[1] M. Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea*, Penguin Press: New York 2012 chap. 2 and pp.245-246.

[2] See G. Roberts, "Stalin's Wartime Vision of the Peace, 1939–1945" in T. Snyder & R. Brandon (eds), *Stalin and Europe: Imitation and Domination, 1928-1953*, Oxford University Press: Oxford 2014.

organisation controlled by peace-loving states that would use their combined strength to maintain collective security.

At no stage during the inter-allied negotiations to establish a successor to the League of Nations did the Soviets waver from this fundamental commitment to a great power peace. While prepared to accommodate British and American desires for a more broad-based and inclusive international organisation, there was no compromise on the core goal of creating an institutional framework for enduring great power unity. This Soviet concept of postwar security was enshrined in the composition, structure and functioning of the UN Security Council, above all in the veto powers of its permanent members. In this respect, the United Nations was at least as much a Soviet creation as it was a British and American one.

The USSR and the League of Nations

When the League of Nations was founded in 1919-1920 the Bolsheviks were in the midst of fighting a civil war and engaged in a life and death struggle not just with domestic opponents but with the massive military intervention of Britain, France and other leading lights of the League of Nations. Not surprisingly they viewed the new organisation as a league of capitalists and imperialists dedicated to counter-revolution. However, Moscow's attitudes began to soften after the Bolshevik victory in the civil war. Increasingly, the League was viewed as an opportunity as well as a threat - as a bridge to winning diplomatic recognition for the new Soviet state and as a means of ending its political and economic isolation. The Soviets also had a direct interest in the array of social, economic and technical issues that now fell within the League's ambit.[4]

[4] My summary of USSR-League relations in the 1920s derives from I.A. Khormach, *Vozvrashchenie v Mirovoe Soobshchestvo: Bor'ba i Sotrudnichestvo Sovetskogo Gosudarstva s Ligoi Natsii v 191-1934gg*, Kuchkovo Pole: Moscow 2011. Based on extensive research in Russian archives, this by the far the most detailed treatment of Soviet policy towards the League of Nations during this period. For an English-language treatment see E.H. Carr's venerable but still valuable works: *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923*, vol.3 Pelican Books: London 1966 pp.138, 246, 347-8, 372, 435; *The Interregnum, 1923-1924*, Pelican Books: London 1969 p.175; and *Foundations of a Planned Economy, 1926-1929*, vol.3-1, Macmillan: London 1976, chap.65.

In the 1920s there was no question of Soviet membership of the League, but Deputy Foreign Commissar Maxim Litvinov was a strong advocate of positive engagement with the Geneva-based organisation. Litvinov's pragmatic approach to the League was resisted by his boss, Georgy Chicherin, who favoured propagandising a radical, people's alterative to the League. Lenin was consistently hostile to the League and while he lived the Chicherin line prevailed. After Lenin's death in 1924 Stalin and the Politburo tended to favour Litvinov's approach, but there was a procedural obstacle to participation in League activities: Soviet relations with Switzerland had broken down after the assassination in May 1923 of V.V. Vorovsky, Moscow's envoy to the Lausanne Conference. When Vorovsky's White Russian assassin was acquitted by a Swiss Court Moscow vowed to take no part in international meetings held in Switzerland - a dispute with Berne that was not resolved until April 1927. Hence it wasn't until the late 1920s and early 1930s that Soviet participation in League-sponsored gatherings really took off. After the USSR joined the League in 1934 the level of participation rose substantially and the Soviet Union signed many international technical agreements and conventions. The Soviets were no strangers to a multifunctional international organisation and when the United Nations was being created they did not block it from taking on the same character even though they preferred a security-focussed entity.

Litvinov was particularly keen to take part in League discussions about the organisation of an international disarmament conference but because of the Vorovsky affair was unable to attend the first three sessions of the Preparatory Commission in Geneva. When he arrived to take part in the fourth session in December 1927 it was as head of large delegation. Thereafter he was a frequent visitor to Geneva; it was the beginning of Litvinov's rise to prominence as an international statesman identified with the cause of peace, disarmament and collective security. A key lieutenant and Litvinov's de facto deputy in relation to League affairs was Boris Shtein, who later played a key role in Soviet preparations for the Dumbarton Oaks conference.

Initially, Litvinov's proposals on disarmament revolved around unrealistic calls for immediate and complete disarmament. But during the course of League discussions the Soviet position evolved toward a more practical position that mapped a gradual process of arms control and disarmament, a tendency that strengthened after Litvinov succeeded Chicherin as Foreign Commissar in 1930.

The League's Disarmament Conference opened in Geneva in February 1932. It was attended by eight non-members of the League, including the Soviet Union. During the conference the Soviets edged ever closer to the idea of involvement in collective security arrangements, which in the 1920s they had opposed, fearing they could become a device for the revival of the capitalist coalition that had attempted to overthrow the Bolsheviks during the Russian civil war.

In parallel moves the Soviet Union adhered to the Kellogg-Briand Pact on the Renunciation of War in 1928 and in 1929 signed a ratification protocol with Poland, Latvia, Estonia and Romania. During this period the Soviet Union also signed a number of non-aggression treaties with other states.[5]

In February1933 the Soviets responded favourably to French proposals to extend the Kellogg pact to include action against aggression. To make the French proposals more workable Litvinov offered a draft definition of aggression and in 1933-1934 a number of states signed a convention based on this definition. As Max Beloff pointed out, these Litvinov initiatives marked a fundamental transition in Soviet foreign policy from an emphasis on the achievement of peace through disarmament to peace enforced by collective security.[6]

The background to all these developments was growing awareness in Moscow that while the Wall Street Crash and the deepening international economic crisis might enhance the prospects for revolution, disarray in the capitalist world also threatened the outbreak of a new world war that could engulf the Soviet Union. In this context the League increasingly came to be seen as, potentially, an important obstacle to war, particularly after Japan's invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and the Nazi seizure of power in Germany in 1933. Indeed, the event that precipitated Soviet membership of the League of Nations was Hitler's decision to withdraw Germany from the organisation in October 1933 in protest at inequitable negotiations about arms control.

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[5] J.A. Large, "The Origins of Soviet Collective Security Policy 1930-1932", *Soviet Studies*, April 1978

[6] M. Beloff, *The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia*, vol.1, Oxford University Press: London 1966 p.52

In the wake of Germany's departure the French proposed that the USSR should join the League of Nations in order to facilitate negotiations for an 'Eastern Locarno' or regional collective security agreement in East-Central Europe. In December 1933 the Soviet Politburo passed a resolution agreeing to the French proposal.[10] On 25 December Stalin told the American journalist Walter Duranty that the Soviet attitude to the League of Nations was not completely negative:

> "No, not always and not under all circumstances…In spite of Germany's and Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations – or just possibly because of it – the League may become a certain factor in retarding the outbreak of hostilities or in preventing them altogether…Yes, if such is the course of historical events the possibility is not excluded that we shall support the League of Nations despite its colossal shortcomings."[11]

The Soviet Union joined the League in September 1934 and was given a permanent seat on its Council. In his acceptance speech Litvinov argued that the threat of war would not be exorcised by resolutions and declarations. More effective means had to be devised to avert war. In present international conditions wars could not be localised and would bring misfortune to all countries, whether neutral or belligerent – an early allusion to the 'peace is indivisible' slogan that made Litvinov famous in the 1930s.[12]

The change in Soviet policy towards the League marked the beginning of Moscow's campaign for collective security, which Ivan Maisky, the Soviet ambassador to Great Britain, summarised as a project to create an "international peace front":

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[10] I.A. Khormach, *SSSR v Lige Natsii, 1934-1939 gg*, Institut Rossiskoi Istorii RAN: Moscow 2017 chap.1. Like Khormach's book on the 1920s the present volume is based on detailed research in the Russian archives. Other works on the USSR and the League in the 1930s include I. Plettenberg, "The Soviet Union and the League of Nations" in *The League of Nations in Retrospect*, Walter de Gruyter: Berlin 1983; S. Dullin, "Les diplomates sovietiques a la Société des Nations", *Relations Internationales*, no.75, automne 1993; and L.R. Tillett, "The Soviet Role in League Sanctions Against Italy, 1936-1936", *The American Slavic and East European Review*, vol.15, no.1 1956.

[11] J. Degras(ed), *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy*, vol.3 (1933-1941), Oxford University Press 1953 p.45.

[12] ibid pp.89-96

> "a firm and stable combination of great and small powers striving for the maintenance of peace within the framework of the League of Nations and their friendly co-operation to avert war up to the point of applying the most extreme measures in case of necessity."[13]

Stalin's take on collective security, expressed to British deputy foreign minister, Anthony Eden when he visited Moscow in March 1935, was as follows:

> "There are in this room, six people, imagine that between ourselves there is a pact of mutual assistance and imagine that, for example, Comrade Maisky wanted to attack one of us – what would happen? We would all join forces to beat Comrade Maisky!"[14]

During the cold war era, when Soviet archives remained closed to foreign researchers, many western historians cast doubt on the authenticity of the Soviet collective security campaign. The most sceptical among these doubters argued that Moscow's collective security policy was a ruse, a cover for Stalin's real aim, which was a pact with Hitler, and a device to extract a better deal from the Nazi leader. Post-Soviet research in the Russian archives has not borne out such views. There is now little doubt that Moscow was serious about forging an anti-Hitler alliance and that collective security and membership of the League of Nations formed part of that broader strategy. Indeed, Soviet activities within the League provide solid evidence of the sincerity of Moscow's collective security campaign.

The collective security campaign had its ups and downs and the Soviets remained deeply suspicious of the British and French. Nor, realising that a radical turn of events was always possible, did they burn all their bridges to Berlin. But the collective security strategy was not finally abandoned until summer 1939 when negotiations for a triple alliance with Britain and France failed. The conclusion of the Nazi-Soviet pact on 23 August 1939 was a second-best

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[13] I. Maisky, *Economic Development of the USSR*, Anglo-Russian Parliamentary Committee: London 1936 p.16

[14] Dokumenty Vneshnei Politiki, vol.18, Moscow 1972 Doc.148.

alternative to collective security, a desperate manoeuvre to keep the USSR out of the impending war over Poland.[15]

After the Soviet Union joined the League, Moscow strove to make it a more effective collective security organisation. As League historian F.P. Waters noted, the USSR's "record in the Council and the Assembly, and her conduct towards the aggressive powers were more consistent with the Covenant than those of any other great power".[16]

As a regular attender at League sessions in Geneva Litvinov used every opportunity to promote Soviet collective security policies. While Litvinov was positive about the League's potential as a collective security organisation, his speeches contained a litany of its failures to act against aggression. As Walters commented:

> "No future historian will lightly disagree with any views expressed by Litvinov on international questions…[his]long series of statements and speeches…can hardly be read today without astonished admiration. Nothing in the annals of the League can compare with them in frankness, in debating power, in the acute analysis of each situation."[17]

The League's credibility as an agency for collective security was severely tested - and found wanting - by the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in October 1935. Before Mussolini's attack the Soviets strove for a peaceful resolution of the Italo-Abyssinian border conflict. Soviet relations with Fascist Italy were good and Moscow was anxious not to push Mussolini into Hitler's camp. But when war began the Soviets condemned Italian aggression and supported economic sanctions against the Mussolini regime. League sanctions lasted until July 1936 but

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[15] See G. Roberts, *The Soviet Union and the Origins of the Second World War*, Macmillan: London 1995; M. Carley, *1939: The Alliance that New Was and the Coming of World War II*, Ivan R. Dee: Chicago 1999; I. A. Chelyshev, *SSSR-Frantsiia: Trudnye gody 1938-1941,* Institut Rossiiskoi Istorii: Moscow 1999; S. Dullin, *Des hommes d'influence: Les ambassadeurs de Staline en Europe, 1930-1939*, Payot: Paris 2001; O. Ken & A. Rupasov, *Zapadnoe Prigraniche. Politbyuro TsK VKP(b) i otnosheniya SSSR s Zapadnymi Sosednimi Gosudarstvami, 1928-1934gg*, Algoritm: Moscow 2014.

[16] F.P. Walters, *A History of the League of Nations*, Oxford University Press: London 1960 p.585

[17] Ibid. p.712. Litvinov's speeches at Geneva are collected in *Against Aggression: Speeches by Maxim Litvinov*, Lawrence & Wishart: London 1939.

were ineffective, partly because they did not include war-waging resources such as coal, iron, steel and oil.

Together with Romania, the USSR was the largest exporter of oil to Italy. Moscow was willing to ban the export of oil, but only if everyone else did, too. Throughout the crisis the Soviet Union was willing to take the strongest possible action against Italy but only as part of a collective effort; it was not willing to act unilaterally. When the war ended and the crisis subsided, Moscow sought to repair its relations with Rome but Soviet-Italian relations deteriorated even further with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936 as a result of the Soviets' backing for the Republican Government against General Franco's fascist-supported mutiny. Thousands of Italian and German troops fought alongside Franco's forces while the Soviets supplied men, munitions and political support to the Republicans and their socialist and communist allies.[18]

The League's failure in the Abyssinian crisis spurred Soviet efforts to transform the organisation into a more effective instrument of collective security. Of particular interest in the light of later discussions about the UN is Litvinov's critique of proposals to amend the Covenant and re-found the League as a universal organisation of states. These proposals came in the wake of the departure of Japan, Germany and Italy from the League and the failure of its sanctions against Mussolini. Their basic thrust was to reduce the collective security commitments of League members, thereby paving the way for the return to the organisation of the aforesaid states. Litvinov mocked these proposals as making the League safe for aggressors and argued "better a League without universality than universality without League principles". Instead of changing the Covenant, the Soviets proposed to strengthen it by the adoption of a protocol that would make sanctions against aggression mandatory upon a vote of threequarters of the Council (thus breaching the League's unanimity rule). League collective security action would also be supplemented by regional mutual assistance pacts, who members would undertake military action against aggressor states.[19] Much to Litvinov's frustration, if not surprise, Soviet proposals to strengthen collective security failed to gain any traction within the League.

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[18] On the USSR, the League and the Abyssinian and Spanish crises see Khormach op.cit chaps 3-4.

[19] Degras op.cit pp.194-199, 206-211, 299- 304. Khormach op.cit pp.253-256; Beloff op.cit vol.2, pp.9-17.

Moscow was also frustrated by the League's failure to implement the Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of Terrorism that it adopted in November 1937. The convention was a French initiative and followed the October 1934 assassination in Marseille of King Alexander I of Yugoslavia and France's foreign minister, Louis Barthou, coincidentally a strong supporter of rapprochement with the USSR. The Soviets signed the convention but felt it was a technical agreement that lacked real commitment to combat terrorism within states as well as internationally.[21]

The Soviet collective security campaign had some early successes, notably the signature of mutual assistance pacts with Czechoslovakia and France in 1935, but it faltered in the face of Anglo-French appeasement of Italy and Germany. By the time appeasement reached its apogee at the Munich Conference of September 1938 Litvinov had lost faith in the utility of the League. A few months later, however, the Soviet collective security campaign unexpectedly revived when Moscow proposed a triple alliance to Britain and France following the German occupation of Prague in March 1939. But the League was bypassed during the ensuing negotiations, the Soviets taking care to ensure it would play no practical role in the operation of the putative triple alliance. On the other hand, the idea of collective security lived on in the form of proposed guarantees of states threatened by German aggression. The creation of what was in effect an Anglo-Soviet-French European collective security system was integral to Moscow's proposal for a triple alliance.

It was Litvinov who proposed the triple alliance to the British and French in April 1939 but it was his successor as Foreign Commissar, Vyacheslav Molotov, who conducted the negotiations. By the end of July there was agreement on the political terms of the alliance but the talks collapsed during military negotiations in Moscow when the British and French failed to satisfy Soviet demands for Red Army right of passage across Poland and Romania in the event of war with Germany.[22]

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[21] I.A. Khormach, "Mezhdunarodnyi Terrorizm, Liga Natsii i Pozitsiya SSSR v 1934-1938", *Rossiiskaya Istoriya*, no.1, 2017.

[22] See G. Roberts, "The Alliance that Failed: Moscow and the Triple Alliance Negotiations, 1939", *European History Quarterly*, vol.26, no.3, 1996.

Fearing the British and French were conspiring to involve the Soviet Union in a war with Germany while they stood on the side-lines, Stalin turned to a deal with Hitler and the signature of the Soviet-German non-aggression pact on 23 August 1939 signalled the end of Moscow's collective security policy. The USSR remained a member of the League but in December 1939 it was excluded from the organisation following the Soviet invasion of Finland – the only state in the League's history removed from membership for aggression. An ignominy that the Soviets never forgot nor forgave.

Planning for Peace

During the period of the Nazi-Soviet pact collective security was superseded by the pursuit of spheres of influence agreements. Appended to the pact was a secret protocol delineating German and Soviet spheres of influence in Poland and the Baltic area. A fortnight after German attack on Poland in September 1939 the Red Army invaded from the east and occupied Western Belorussia and Western Ukraine – lands the Poles had captured during the Russo-Polish war of 1919-1920. In autumn 1939 Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were forced by Moscow to sign mutual assistance pacts and allow the establishment of Soviet military bases. It was Finland's refusal to do likewise that led to the Winter War of 1939-1940. In summer 1940 the three Baltic states were occupied by the Soviet Union and incorporated as republics of the USSR. Around the same time the Soviets grabbed another disputed territory – Bessarabia – from Romania and attempted to negotiate a spheres of influence agreement with Italy in relation to the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. From Moscow's point of view these were defensive moves – a response to Germany's military triumph over France – but Berlin viewed them as aggressive and threatening, precipitating a crisis in Soviet-German relations which culminated in Hitler's attack on the USSR in June 1941.

Spheres of influence thinking continued to feature in Soviet diplomacy even after the outbreak of war.[23] When Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Secretary, visited Stalin in December 1941 he was presented with a draft treaty of alliance that included a secret protocol on postwar borders, territorial transfers and the establishment of British military bases in Western Europe and Soviet ones in Finland and Romania. The protocol also contained a clause on the creation of a "European Council" that would have military forces at its disposal

[23] See ibid "Ideology, Calculation, and Improvisation: Spheres of Influence in Soviet Foreign Policy, 1939-1945, *Review of International Studies*, vol.25, October 1999.

and would safeguard peace in Europe.[24] Nothing came of these proposals – for the British they were premature and would face American hostility to spheres of influence agreements – but they did signal early Soviet thinking about the postwar world, which centred on the consolidation of the USSR's wartime territorial gains and the establishment of long-term security arrangements.

Shortly after Eden departed Moscow Deputy Foreign Commissar Solomon Lozovsky wrote to Stalin and Molotov arguing that it was time to begin preparations for the peace conference that would follow the end of the war. Lozovsky's memorandum focussed on Soviet borders and the treatment of Germany and did not mention postwar international organisation.[25] However, on the 28 January 1942 the Politburo established a commission on plans for the postwar organisation of states in Europe, Asia and other parts of the world. Under its rubric a Commission for the Preparation of Diplomatic Materials was created to research foreign discussions of postwar security, including in relation to a successor to the League of Nations. Among the topics of interest were the experience of previous peace conferences, proposals for an international army and postwar economic questions.[26] Over the next year this commission did a lot of research but had no discernible impact on Soviet policymaking.[27]

Of crucial importance to the evolution of Soviet thinking about postwar security was Molotov's encounter with President Franklin Roosevelt in Washington DC in June 1942. Molotov had travelled to the US capital to discuss the possibility of an Anglo-American Second Front in France. During his talks with Roosevelt in the White House – which were witnessed by Litvinov, at that time Soviet ambassador in Washington – the American President proposed that after the war there should be an international police force of the USA, Britain, the USSR and China that would use its collective military power to enforce a

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[24] O.A. Rzheshevsky (ed), *War and Diplomacy: The Making of the Grand Alliance*, Harwood Academic Publishers: Amsterdam 1996 doc.5

[25] G.P. Kynin & J. Laufer (eds), *SSSR i Germanskii Vopros*, vol.1, Mezhdunarodye Otnosheniya: Moscow 1996 doc.15.

[26] O. J. Skatun, *In the Interest of Freedom-Loving Peoples: The Soviet Union and the Emerging United Nations, 1942-1946*, LSE-CU MA Dissertation 2016 pp.11-12. I am grateful to the author for a copy of his very interesting thesis and the Soviet document that he cites.

[27] For a summary of the commission's work until February 1943 see *SSSR i Germanskii Vopros* doc.38.

prolonged peace. Stalin responded with enthusiasm to Molotov's messages relaying Roosevelt's ideas:

> "Roosevelt's considerations about peace protection after the war are absolutely sound. There is no doubt that it would be impossible to maintain peace in future without creating a united military force by Britain, the USA and the USSR capable of preventing aggression."[28]

But Stalin had a war to fight and took no active interest in postwar questions until after the Soviet victory at Kursk in July 1943. In summer 1943 the commission on postwar organisation was replaced by two other bodies: an Armistice Commission to deal with surrender terms for enemy states and a Commission on Peace Treaties and the Postwar Order, which was headed by Litvinov, who had been recalled from the United States. On 9 September Litvinov sent Stalin and Molotov a list of questions that should be considered by his commission. Among the issues listed under the heading "International Organisations and the Safeguarding of Peace and Security" were the fate of the League of Nations, the role of big and small powers, an international police force for the protection of peace, disarmament, and the definition of aggression.[29]

The Moscow and Tehran Conferences

This reorganisation of the Soviet postwar planning apparatus was prompted by the impending Moscow Conference of the Foreign Ministers of Britain, the United States and the USSR. Conceived as a preliminary to the Tehran summit of Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin, the conference developed into a wide-ranging exchange of views on postwar questions.

Litvinov was a prolific contributor of pre-conference briefing papers, including one on 'joint responsibility for Europe as opposed to separate spheres of responsibility" dated 9 October 1943.[30] Its theme was who would be responsible for common security after the war. Would it be a collective responsibility or would it be organised on the basis of "zones of security" or "zones of influence"? Opinion in the west favoured an international organisation to regulate a

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[28] Rzheshevsky op.cit doc.82.

[29] Arkhiv Vneshenei Politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii (hereafter AVPRF), F.6, Op.6, Pap.14, D.149, Ll.9-17.

[30] *SSSR i Germanskii Vopros* doc.62.

new, norms-based international order. This organisation would have the right and the power to impose its will on states. The experience of the League of Nations, argued Litvinov, showed there were problems with this concept. What would be the structure of the new organisation? What would be the roles of big and small countries? Who would lead the organisation? If the answer was Britain, China, the Soviet Union and the United States what would be the nature of their relationships with one another within the organisation? Would "these four powers be collectively answerable for the peace of the whole world or will each have its own special zone based on the area in which it has the most direct interest?"

Litvinov preferred what he called "the concept of dividing the world into defined zones of security". In Litvinov's view the League's history showed that general collective security arrangements did not work and that its successor organisation should be buttressed by specific agreements among the great powers, including division of the world into spheres of interest. Such arrangements would obviate the need for complicated and impractical plans for an international army and would serve to separate great power interests and thereby avoid conflicts between them. Litvinov propounded these kind of views, both publicly and privately, throughout discussions leading to the foundation of the United Nations, but they failed to gain purchase with the Soviet leadership, not least because the British and Americans were not interested in such grandiose schemas.[31]

At the Foreign Ministers' conference discussions about a successor to the League of Nations revolved around an American proposal to establish an international security organisation after the war. One stumbling block was whether China should be a signatory of the proposed declaration on international security since the USSR was not yet involved in the Far Eastern war. There were other issues but nothing major and it was agreed that China would sign the declaration, published on 2 November, which called for a postwar international security organisation. Towards the end of these discussions Molotov, following Litvinov's advice, proposed that, to take the matter forward Britain, the Soviet Union and United States should establish a trilateral investigation body. It was from this proposal that flowed the discussions leading to the Dumbarton Oaks conference of August-September 1944.[32]

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[31] See G. Roberts, "Litvinov's Lost Peace, 1941-1946", *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol.4, no.2, Spring 2002.

[32] On the Moscow conference discussions: D.K. Dolff, *The Creation of the United Nations Organisation as a Factor in Soviet Foreign Policy, 1943-46*, University of Alberta PhD thesis

At Tehran Stalin and Roosevelt discussed postwar security at their second bilateral meeting, on 29 November. Roosevelt outlined his plan for a general organisation of all allied states; an executive committee of ten or eleven countries; and a "police committee" of the Big Three plus China. Stalin observed that the small European states would not like such an organisation and suggested instead the establishment of separate organisations for Europe and the Far East. Roosevelt objected that Congress would never agree to membership of a solely European body. Stalin asked that if a world organisation was formed would the United States send troops to Europe? Not necessarily said Roosevelt. In the event of aggression, the US would provide ships and planes rather than troops. Stalin noted that Germany would be able to re-establish its power in 15 or 20 years, which meant the great powers had to be able to occupy positions in and around the country, and the same was true of Japan. Roosevelt agreed wholeheartedly with Stalin and at a subsequent meeting the Soviet leader indicated that he now agreed with Roosevelt's proposal for a single international organisation.[33]

After the conference Stalin's staff drafted a summary of his discussions at Tehran, which he hand-corrected. Under the heading "International Organisation" the document noted Stalin's proposal for two international organisations but Stalin changed this to state that he had no objection to Roosevelt's proposal for a world organisation. Uncorrected was this summary: "Comrade Stalin indicated that the formation of such an organisation was not sufficient in itself. It was necessary to create an organisation with the right to occupy strategically important points to prevent Germany and Japan from embarking on new aggression."[34]

Towards Dumbarton Oaks

Shortly after Stalin's return from Tehran Litvinov's commission was instructed to prepare proposals on the principles and practicalities of a postwar security organisation. The first of many such commission documents, dated 16 December 1943, was produced by Boris Shtein,

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2010 pp.64-75, The Soviet records of the conference may be found in *Moskovskaya Konferentsiya Ministrov Inostrannykh Del SSSR, SShA i Velikobritanii, 19-30 Oktyabra 1943g*, Politizdat: Moscow 1984. Dr Dolff's invaluable thesis is available on the internet.

[33] See G. Roberts, "Stalin at the Tehran, Yalta, and Potsdam Conferences", *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol.9, no. 4 2007 pp.8-20.

[34] Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial'no-Politicheskoi Istorii (hereafter RGASPI, F.558, Op.11, D.234, Ll.103-104.

the former ambassador to Italy, whose experience of working with the League in the 1920s and 1930s was second only to Litvinov's.

The negative historical experience of the League loomed large in Shtein's document on the basic principles of the future organisation. A fundamental drawback of the League had been its multi-functional character, which distracted attention from security issues. Social, economic and cultural issues should be dealt with separately, wrote Shtein, and the new organisation should not interfere in the internal affairs of states with regard to the treatment of ethnic minorities that spanned national borders. Ethnic issues poisoned international relations and the League had failed to find a solution to any of them. In relation to the colonial question Shtein considered the League's mandate system another form of imperialist exploitation and suggested that a future peace conference should focus on the fate of Italy's colonies and the mandate territories controlled by Japan.

Regarding the constitution of the new organisation, Shtein said that membership should be restricted to allied countries, with enemy states excluded for at least 10-15 years. Structurally, there should be a council, a general assembly and a secretariat. Crucially, the council, which would consist solely of Britain, China, the United States and the USSR, would operate on the principle of unanimity. The assembly would meet once a year to discuss issues referred to it by the council. Under Shtein's scheme all states would be obliged to impose sanctions against aggression as directed by the council or forfeit their membership of the organisation.[35]

In the ensuing discussions Litvinov and his commission raised three further sets of issues. Firstly, the need to make sure the assembly's role was consultative so that it could not be used by states hostile to the Soviet Union. Secondly, there was the potentially excessive influence of a pro-US Latin American bloc, Litvinov's solution being the creation within the organisation of regional sub-structures which would preclude Latin American involvement in European affairs. Thirdly, the organisation's role in the peaceful resolution of disputes between states was seen as problematic and Litvinov recommended a restrictive approach to

[35] Shtein's document is cited in detail in "SSSR i Sozdanie OON" in E.I. Rychkova, A.P. Aristov & E.R/ Aroyan (eds), *Velikaya Otechestvennaya Voina, 1914-1945 godov*, vol.?, Kuchkovo Pole: Moscow 201? pp.566-568 and T. Yu.Kochetkova, " Voprosy Sozdaniya OON i Sovetskaya Diplomatiya", *Otechestvennaya Istoriya*, no.1 1995 p.30.

protect the Soviet position from interference i.e. the new international organisation should only involve itself in disputes that threatened peace in general.[36]

In February 1944 the British gave the Soviets a list of questions about a new security organisation to be discussed at a forthcoming conference in Washington DC. Prompted by the British note Litvinov wrote to Molotov on 21 February highlighting what he thought were the main issues: relations between the assembly and the council (the "directing organisation"); the issue of unanimous voting; and the role of regional agreements in a system of general security. Litvinov drafted a reply to the British for Molotov but it was never sent.[37] A month later Litvinov returned to this issue, noting that there had been a further communication from the British as well as a list of question for discussion from the Americans via Andrei Gromyko, Litvinov's deputy when he was ambassador in the US and his successor in that post. Analysing these communications Litvinov noted a retreat by the British and Americans from the idea that the great powers should play the decisive role in the new organisation. Litvinov urged Molotov to get the western allies to define their position on this crucial question.[38] On 4 April Molotov replied to the British note, stating that in the first instance there should be a discussion of fundamental issues such as the role of the organisation's directing body and the relationship between the general and regional systems of security. While Molotov did not object in principle to an advance exchange of memorandums about the projected organisation he thought it better to just agree the questions that would be discussed at the forthcoming Washington conversations.[39]

Towards the end of April Litvinov composed an extensive note on the "International Security Organisation", which reprised many of Shtein's themes. In relation to the League Litvinov noted the widespread view that it had failed because of the "egotistical" behaviour of the big powers, which had pursed their separate interests rather than the common good of humanity. This was true, said Litvinov, but such behaviour was only to be expected of capitalist states and the League's experience demonstrated the inexpediency of unclear and imprecise security commitments between great powers. To remedy this defect the great powers had to

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[36] "SSSR i Sozdanie OON" p.568-569.
[37] AVPRF F.06, Op.6, Pap.13, D.133, Ll.1-3.
[38] Ibid Ll.4-5
[39] *Konferentsiya Predstavitelei SSSR, SShA i Velikobritanii v Dumbarton-Okse*, Politizdat: Moscow 1984 doc.7.

enter into precise and concrete agreements with each other, including the division of the world into zones of security responsibility. France was not included in Litvinov's schema because in his view the country would not recover its great power status after the war and would remain dependent on Great Britain. To make France the fifth member of the organisation's directing body alongside Britain, China, the Soviet Union and the United States, would only serve to strengthen the British position.

Litvinov concluded, inter-alia, that, firstly, the League had to be replaced by a new international organisation. Secondly, that its prime function should be to prevent and act against aggression. Thirdly, that the organisation's sanctions against aggression should include military action. Fourthly, that the great powers should agree among themselves how they would jointly implement military action. Fifthly, the organisation should have at its disposal an international military corps. Sixthly, that its membership base would be the states of the wartime allied coalition and that countries which discriminated against minorities or sought to dominate other nations would be excluded. Finally, the organisation's General Secretary would be a nominee of one of the four great powers while the other three would be represented by Deputy General Secretaries.[40]

When Litvinov's paper was discussed by his commission it was broadly supported but challenged in some respects by Lozovsky, who argued that inter-state social antagonisms would re-emerge after the war, including the danger of an Anglo-American bloc directed against the USSR. Lozovsky also questioned Litvinov's characterisation of the role of France, arguing that the French would not be happy as a British satellite and that their membership of the council might well suit Soviet purposes. Presaging one of the big issues ay Dumbarton Oaks, Lozovsky proposed that all 16 Soviet republics should be independent members of the international security organisation.[41]

Lozovsky's latter proposal was inspired by the January 1944 decision of the Soviet communist party's central committee to change the People's Commissariats of Defence and Foreign Affairs from "all-union" to "union-republic" i.e. from ministries that represented the

[40] AVPRF, F.6, Op.6, Pap.14, D.144, Ll.1-77. This document may now be found online (in Russian) at http://agk.mid.ru/fonds/sovetsko-britanskie-otnosheniya/
[41] Kochetkova pp.32-35.

USSR to those representing each of its national republics. In the early days of Soviet power Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belorussia, Georgia and Ukraine had diplomatic relations with other states, ran their own foreign ministries and signed international agreements. The revival of direct foreign involvements of the republics, argued Molotov in his speech to the Supreme Soviet, strengthen the USSR's presence in world affairs.

In a longer, unpublished version of this speech – the one he gave to the central committee as opposed to the Supreme Soviet – Molotov detailed past foreign involvements of the Soviet republics and pointed to new opportunities for their participation in international organisations, for example in relation to the punishment of war criminals. He also pointed out that British Dominions participated in the Versailles peace conference and had been independently represented in various international organisations.

Stalin read and edited Molotov's speech to the central committee and took the trouble to delete this sentence: "of course, the foreign policy of the Republics must not contradict the foreign policy of the Union and must be conducted within the framework of Union foreign policy."[42] While it is difficult to believe that Stalin contemplated allowing the republics any significant degree of autonomy in foreign policy, he does seem – in the warm afterglow of Tehran – to have been willing to expand the USSR's channels of communication and interconnection with the outside world.

While Litvinov's commission discussed policy issues Molotov was being pressed by the British and Americans to agree a date for the Washington conference and to exchange memorandums on the proposed security organisation. Molotov argued that such a detailed exchange was not necessary and strove to limit the scope of the forthcoming discussions at Dumbarton Oaks but in the end the Soviets were forced by allied pressure to compose their own memorandum on postwar security.

This process began with the submission on 6 July of another long document by Litvinov on the international security organisation. Litvinov's most important formulation – that the organisation should be firmly controlled by a great power directorate operating on the

[42] Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Noveishei Istorii, F.2, Op.2, D.271, L.130.

principle of unanimity – was retained but he was disappointed by the outcome of the drafting process. His key concept was that the organisation should be founded on bilateral and multilateral agreements between the great powers forming its core: "the central point of our memorandum is the proposal for the conclusion of separate agreements between the great powers. Without such agreements we fear the new organisation will suffer the same fate as the League of Nations." Litvinov also favoured regional organisations and agreements under the hegemony of particular great powers. Neither idea figured in the Soviet position paper for Dumbarton Oaks.[43]

Crucial to the internal evolution of the Soviet position was an intervention by Jacob Malik Moscow's ambassador in Japan. Malik noted that since the USSR was not involved in the Far Eastern war it could be excluded from the region's peace settlement, especially in the context of a security organisation based on zones of security and regional structures, which would facilitate American claims for leadership in the Pacific and the Far East. Malik also pointed out that in this schema the UK would be represented in four regional organisations, the USA in three and the USSR only in two (Europe and Asia).[44]

When the directives to the Soviet delegation to Dumbarton Oaks were drafted in mid-July the issue of regional organisation was deemed to required further discussion and such structures would only be acceptable if the four great powers had equal rights in all of them. By the time the directives were finalised that position had hardened into opposition to strong regional organisations.[45]

The final draft of the Soviet memorandum on the international security organisation, presented to Stalin on 5 August, included anther important amendment: acceptance of an American proposal that a seat on the council should be reserved for France. There had been an ongoing discussion within the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs about whether or not it was possible or desirable to restore French power and prestige after the war. While this

[43] AVPRF D.134 L. 1-32, quote on L.32. In October 1944 Litvinov complained to journalist Edgar Snow that at Dumbarton Oaks his plan for an international security organisation had been discarded in favour of an altogether different scheme (Roberts, Litvinov's Lost Peace p.40).
[44] ibid Ll.44-50.
[45] Ibid D.135 ll.15-16.

decision represented a victory for those who favoured restoration, the paper trail indicates that the policy shift was more a case of appeasing the Americans than anything else. [46]

The Soviet memorandum, dated 12 August, pulled together the threads of months of internal discussions. The new international security organisation should be an organisation of peace-loving states dedicated to preventing and suppressing aggression and preserving peace. While the USSR was in favour of social, economic and technical cooperation between states this should be the remit of a separate organisation or organisations.

The key institution would be a Council of five great-power permanent members together with representatives from the General Assembly of all states. The Council would take all measures, including military, to protect peace. Its decisions would be binding on all members of the organisation. Decisions relating to peace enforcement action would require the consent of all the Council's permanent members. To give the organisation some teeth member states would place at its disposal armed forces, to be controlled by a military committee. There would also be an international air force corps. While the General Assembly was subordinated to the Council it would have the latitude to raise security issues on its own initiative, to discuss disarmament and arms control, and vote on the admission and expulsion of new members, albeit on recommendation of the Council.[47]

The confidential instructions for the Soviet delegation to Dumbarton Oaks stated that the most important issue was the role and composition of the Council and the principle of great-power unanimity. While the memorandum spoke of the need for further discussions about regional organisation the delegation was instructed to clarify the American and British position on this question, bearing in mind the USSR's opposition to the creation of regional organisations with broad rights within the international system of security. The directive's final instruction was that no binding decisions were to be taken at Dumbarton Oaks without the consent of all participants.[48]

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[46] Ibid Ll.32-34.

[47] *Dumbarton-Okse* doc.26. A full English translation of the Soviet memorandum may be found here: https://52.200.115.76/historicaldocuments/frus1944v01/d415.

[48] "Direktivy k Peregovoram o Sozdanii Mezhdunarodnoi Organizatsii Bezopastnosti", *Istoricheskki Arkhiv*, no.4, 1995 pp.78-82.

From Dumbarton Oaks to Yalta

The Soviet delegation to the Dumbarton Oaks conference was led by Gromyko. His eight-member delegation included A.A. Sobolev, a counsellor in the Soviet embassy in London, S.K. Tsarapkin, the head of the Foreign Commissariat's American Department together with military and legal advisors.

Even before Dumbarton Oaks the Soviets made a number of concessions to British and American preferences – the exchange of memorandums, the inclusion of France as a permanent member of the council, a bigger role for the general assembly and the establishment of an International Court. This pattern of compromise continued at the conference. The Soviets accepted the new organisation would be multifunctional, including a social and economic committee, and that its name would be the United Nations rather than International Security Organisation or World Union. They dropped their proposal for an international air force. They conceded that membership of the UN should be open to all peace-loving nations, not just those states which had fought as part of the allied coalition. In his memoirs Gromyko recalled that "the Dumbarton Oaks conference agreed 90% of the issues concerning the creation of the UN."[49]

There were two major sticking points in the negotiations. Firstly, a Soviet proposal that all 16 of the USSR's national republics should be independent members of the UN. The Americans were so paranoid this proposal would become public knowledge that it was labelled the 'X-matter'. Secondly, there was the issue of the veto. As the Soviet delegation's secretary, M.M. Yunin, noted in his post-Dumbarton Oaks summary report "this was the most difficult question discussed at the conference."[50]

The Soviet position on the veto was that all Security Council decisions required the unanimous support of its permanent members. Before the conference the Americans had

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[49] A. Gromyko, *Memories*, Hutchinson: London 1989 p.115. A detailed analysis of the Dumbarton Oaks conversations from the Soviet perspective may be found in Dolff's PhD thesis op.cit pp.119-181. The Soviet records of the conversations may be found in AVPRF F.06, Op.6, Pap.13, D.128, 130. Gromyko's reports home during the conference are published in *Dumbarton-Okse* op.cit but not the instructions he received from Moscow. Many Soviet documents on Dumbarton Oaks may now be found online at http://agk.mid.ru/fonds/sovetsko-britanskie-otnosheniya/

[50] AVPRF, F.6, Op.6, Pap.12, D.135, L.27.

tabled a memorandum, which incorporated the same principle but with the proviso there would be a special procedure when a permanent member was involved in a dispute. The Soviets were happy to discuss such a procedure as long as it didn't undermine the principle of unanimity. At Dumbarton Oaks the British and Americans sought to devise a formula which would restrict the veto power of the great powers in some circumstances. Under strict instructions from Moscow to oppose any diminution of the veto the Soviet delegation dug its heels in and there was deadlock. Roosevelt appealed to Stalin over Gromyko's head but received short shrift from the Soviet dictator:

> "The voting procedure in the Council will, I feel, be of appreciable importance to the success of the International Security Organisation because it is essential that the Council should base its work on the principle of agreement and unanimity…Otherwise the agreement reached at the Tehran Conference, where we were guided by the desire to ensure the unity of action so vital to preventing future aggression will be reduced to nought."[51]

Notwithstanding the failure to agree on the membership and veto issues, Stalin's appraisal of Dumbarton Oaks was highly positive. In his November 1944 speech on the anniversary of the Russian Revolution he noted that

> "there is talk of differences between the three Powers on certain security problems. Differences do exist, of course, and they will arise on a number of other issues as well…The surprising thing is not that differences exist, but that they are so few, and that as a rule in practically every case they are resolved in a spirit of unity and coordination among the three Great Powers. What matters is not that there are differences, but that these differences do not transgress the bounds of what the interests of the unity of the three Great Powers allow, and that, in the long run, they are resolved in accordance with the interests of that unity… What is characteristic of this Conference is not that certain differences were revealed there, but that nine-tenths of the security problems were solved at this Conference in a spirit of complete

[51] *Correspondence between the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR and the Presidents of the USA and the Prime Ministers of Great Britain during the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945*, vol.2, Foreign Languages Publishing House: Moscow 1957 doc.227.

> unanimity. That is why I think that the decisions of the Dumbarton Oaks Conference are to be regarded as a striking indication of the solidity of the front of the anti-German Coalition."

Stalin was also emphatic the allied states should

> "establish a special organization made up of representatives of the peace-loving nations for the defence of peace and safeguarding of security; put at the disposal of the directing body of this organization the necessary minimum of armed forces required to avert aggression, and oblige this organization to employ these armed forces without delay if it becomes necessary, to avert or stop aggression, and to punish those guilty of aggression.
>
> This must not be a repetition of the sad memory of the League of Nations, which had neither the right nor the means to avert aggression. It will be a new, special, fully authorized international organization having at its command everything necessary to defend peace and avert new aggression.
>
> Can we expect the actions of this world organization to be sufficiently effective? They will be effective if the great Powers which have borne the brunt of the war against Hitler Germany continue to act in a spirit of unanimity and accord. They will not be effective if this essential condition is violated."[52]

How did Stalin's thinking about security and the postwar order fit into his broader ideological worldview? Firstly, Stalin believed that while inter-state war was inevitable as long as capitalism and imperialism existed this inherent dynamic could be constrained by political action, including at the international level. Secondly, the objective basis for postwar cooperation with Britain and the United States was a common interest in the containment of Germany and Japan. Thirdly, the enhanced power of the Soviet Union as a result of the war meant that Moscow would have much more influence in international affairs than it had during the prewar period, when Britain and France had controlled the course of events,

[52] https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1944/11/06.htm

including the fate of the League of Nations. Fourthly, the global political tide was running in the Soviet and communist favour. Europe, in particular, would be transformed by the impact of the war, not by Bolshevik revolution but by the continuation of anti-fascist unity under the leadership of communists and socialists. Finally, prolonged peaceful coexistence between capitalism and communism would allow the Soviet Union to recover from the trauma of war whilst at the same time facilitating the maturation of the political conditions necessary for a gradual, world-wide transition to socialism.[53]

Stalin's thinking and calculations were personal as well as political and ideological. His November 1944 speech was delivered when the unity of the grand alliance was at its height. Dumbarton Oaks had been a successful conference and in June 1944 the western allies had invaded northern France, ending a long-running dispute with the Soviets about the launching of a second front. Recently, there had been acrimony about Stalin's failure to aid the Warsaw uprising of August 1944 but that had been forgiven and forgotten (except by the Poles) by the time Churchill arrived in Moscow in October for his second wartime visit to the Soviet capital. In a celebrated meeting on 9 October Churchill proposed to Stalin the division of Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Romania and Yugoslavia into percentage-based British and Soviet spheres of influence. In the event Churchill's infamous proposal was of little practical importance except that Stalin did refrain from interfering in Greek affairs, at least for a while. But Churchill's eagerness to even talk about such a wide-ranging deal was psychologically reassuring for Stalin as he prepared for a Big Three summit at Yalta. Churchill had become Stalin's comrade in arms during the war and there seemed to be a real prospect the relationship would continue in peacetime. Stalin's relations with Roosevelt were less intimate but he admired the American President as what he called a great man in both war and peace.

Churchill's trip to Moscow was not welcomed by Roosevelt, who feared, quite rightly, that some deal might be done behind his back. It confirmed what Stalin had observed at Tehran: that there were some personal and political tensions between Churchill and Roosevelt, differences that he could utilise to his advantage.[54]

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[53] See further G. Roberts, *Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953*, Yale University Press: London 2006 chap.8.

[54] See further M. Folly, G. Roberts & O.A. Rzheshevsky, *Churchill and Stalin: Comrades-in-Arms during the Second World War*, Pen & Sword Books: Barnsley 2019.

The UN at Yalta

In December Roosevelt tried to persuade Stalin to accept a compromise whereby the veto would not apply to votes on procedural matters or when a permanent member was party to disputes involving peaceful resolution. When no enforcement action was contemplated the permanent member involved in dispute would abstain in the voting. Stalin firmly rejected Roosevelt's proposal on grounds that it breached the principle of unanimity and that any gaps in the veto power could be exploited by small states to sow discord among the great powers.[55]

In the run-up to the Yalta conference Soviet policymakers signalled to Stalin and Molotov that they should continue to take a hard line on the negotiation of the unresolved issues of Dumbarton Oaks.[56] At Yalta, however, both the veto issue and the question of independent representation for the USSR's national republics were resolved amicably. It was agreed the USSR would get two or three extra seats at the UN. In return Stalin was prepared to grant the Americans extra votes but the offer was not taken up. After listening to British and American arguments about the veto and Security Council voting procedures Stalin reversed his position and accepted the formula that Roosevelt had put to him in December. The Americans were delighted. As Kathleen Harriman, the daughter of the American ambassador to Moscow, recorded in one of her letters from Yalta that "there was great rejoicing last night, they sold UJ [Uncle Joe Stalin] on Dumbarton Oaks, Very good indeed."[57]

It has been suggested that Stalin accepted Roosevelt's compromise as a trade-off for the extra seats at the UN. Another view is that Stalin did not really grasp the Americans' complicated formula and may have thought the Soviet Union retained the power to veto discussion by the Security Council. More likely is that Stalin had something deeper in mind. During Big Three discussions of the voting issue Stalin emphasised the need to construct an organisation that would keep the peace and maintain great power unity for 50 years. In that perspective satisfying his partners' desire for a more flexible voting procedure that would allow greater

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[55] Correspondence op.cit doc.253.

[56] I.V. Gaiduk, *Divided Together: The United States and the Soviet Union in the United Nations, 1945-1965*, Stanford University Press: Stanford 2012 p.29; AVPRF, F.06, Op.7a, D.5. L.19.

[57] Cited by G. Roberts, "The Wartime Correspondence of Kathleen Harriman", *Harriman Magazine*, Winter 2015 p.19.

discussion on the Security Council may have weighed more heavily with Stalin than fears about it turning into a platform for anti-Soviet machinations.

It was agreed at Yalta to convene the founding conference of the UN in San Francisco in April.[58] Stalin's original plan was that Molotov would lead a high-power delegation consisting of many prominent party and government leaders. Its composition and status, as Vladimir Pechatnov notes, was intended "to emphasise the USSR's special role in the founding of the United Nations as well as the great importance the Kremlin attached to the launch of this international organisation." However, because of the so-called "Berne Crisis", Molotov's trip to the US was quietly cancelled and the delegation downgraded to a lower-level group of officials headed by Gromyko.[59] This decision was partially reversed after Roosevelt's death in April 1945 when Averell Harriman, the American ambassador in Moscow, persuaded a grieving Stalin that Molotov should attend the UN conference and en route to San Francisco take the opportunity to meet the new US President, Harry Truman. After meeting Truman in Washington, Molotov travelled to San Francisco to take part in the early phases of the conference. remaining until early May when Gromyko took charge of the delegation.[60]

San Francisco

In his speech to the opening session on 26 April 1945 Molotov reminded his audience that the Second World War could have been avoided had the League of Nations not betrayed the hopes of those who believed in it. But no one wanted to restore the League and the goal was to create a new international organisation with the power to resist aggression and safeguard

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[58] *Konferentsiya Ob'edinennykj Natsii v San-Frantsisko*, Politizdat: Moscow 1984 doc.1. This volume contains the Soviet records of the conference, including Gromyko's reports to Moscow.

[59] V.O. Pechatnov, "Averell Harriman's Mission to Moscow", *The Harriman Review*, June 2003 p.25. The Berne Crisis was the result of an approach to US Intelligence at the end of February 1945 by General Karl Wolff, a high-ranking SS officer, who proposed a ceasefire in Italy. Meetings were held in Switzerland and when told about them the Soviets asked to be involved. The Americans did not think this was necessary but Moscow, suspecting a plot to allow the transfer of German forces to the Russian front, was outraged by the rejection.

[60] It was on this trip to the United States that Molotov had his famously bruising encounter with Truman, who claimed in his memoirs he had given the Soviet leader a dressing down. Truman's claim is a myth, however. See G. Roberts, "Sexing up the Cold War: New Evidence on the Molotov-Truman Talks of April 1945", *Cold War History*, vol.4, no.3. April 2004.

peace. To that end the collaboration of the great powers that had fought Hitler should continue in peacetime.

While Molotov did not explicitly demand a great-power peace he attacked those he labelled opponents of an effective international organisation, who were trying to subvert the creation of the UN by using slogans about the interests of small states or the principles of justice and equality of nations.[61]

Even before Yalta Litvinov had warned Molotov that signals coming from the Latin American states indicated "an attempt at full restoration of the old League of Nations". They wanted more representation on the Security Council, equal powers for the General Assembly and a greater role for the International Court.[62] On 14 April Molotov sent Stalin the directives for the Soviet delegation to San Francisco. The directives noted a stream of proposals from smaller states that aimed to limit the authority of the Security Council and enhance that of the General Assembly – proposals which were to be resisted in order to avoid "the mistakes and defects of the League Nations".[63] An additional note to the directives stressed that "any kind of proposals which minimise the role and importance of the Security Council should not be adopted, since their adoption would lead to the weakening of the International Organisation and depriving it of a possibility to effectively pursues tasks of maintaining peace and security."[64] A particular concern, which Stalin seems to have taken an interest in, was that the membership and powers of the International Court would be expanded to the detriment of the Security Council.[65]

The San Francisco conference was beset by a number of controversies. As expected there was pressure from states to dilute the power of the Security Council. There was resistance to

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[61] V.M. Molotov, *Problems of Foreign Policy: Speeches and Statements, April-1945-November 1948*, Foreign Languages Publishing House: Moscow 1949 pp.13-20.
[62] Skatun op. cit p.34
[63] ibid p.35.
[64] Gaiduk op.cit p.34
[65] Skatun op.cit pp.36-41. There is evidence that at this time Stalin was very interested in legal and constitutional issues (as he had been in 1936 when a new Soviet Constitution was introduced). One of the books In his personal library – which he read attentively – was a 1945 Soviet manual on the laws and constitutions for foreign states (RGASPI, F.558, Op.3 D.369).

separate membership for Ukraine and Belorussia. The thorniest issue – which Molotov dealt with while he was in San Francisco – was Argentina's membership of the UN. Argentina did not declare war on Germany until a month after the 1 March deadline for founding membership of the UN that had been agreed at Yalta. Argentina had been at the forefront of efforts to expel the USSR from the League of Nations in 1939 and during the war had practiced a neutrality which the Soviets viewed as favourable to the Axis. (They thought the same about Turkey but it had declared war on Germany on 23 February 1945). Much to their disgust Argentina's membership was voted through with British and American support. Allied to this was a spat about whether or not Poland's Soviet-backed Provisional Government should be invited to the conference. The political composition of that government was the subject of a dispute among the Big Three that was not resolved until after the San Francisco conference. The veto issued flared again when the Soviets insisted that it was up to the Security Council to determine the subjects it discussed and that such decisions could be vetoed by permanent members. Not until after Stalin's intervention at the end of May did the Soviet delegation to relinquish this position.

As David Dolff has pointed out, the San Francisco Conference was by no means a uniformly negative experience for the Soviets. Ukraine and Belorussia were admitted as independent members. Soviet criticism of Franco's fascist Spain was broadly supported. The Soviet delegation was welcomed enthusiastically by the American public. Moscow's insistence on the central military role of the great powers within the UN was not substantially contested. The powers of the General Assembly and the International Court were limited. Above all, the decisions on the role and functioning of the Security Council taken at Dumbarton Oaks and Yalta remained intact and the Soviets achieved their fundamental goal of an international security organisation under the firm control of the great powers operating on the principle of unanimity.[66]

Whether or not the UN would become an effective instrument of collective security remained to be seen, but Stalin and Molotov were hopeful, if not confident, that wartime collaboration with the British and Americans would continue in peacetime.

[66] Dolff op.cit pp.255-320 contains a detailed analysis of the Soviet role at the San Francisco Conference.

Stalin went on a long holiday after the war and it fell to Molotov to give the Revolution anniversary speech in November 1945. "The Anglo-Soviet-American anti-Hitler coalition", he stated "is now undergoing a test of its strength. Will the coalition prove as strong and capable of joint decisions under new conditions"? Molotov had two particular tests in mind. The first was the recent failure of the founding meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) in London in September 1945. The CFM had been established by the Potsdam Conference to discuss peace treaties for former enemy states – negotiations which foundered in the face of western refusal to recognise the communist-controlled governments of Rumania and Bulgaria. The second test concerned the UN:

> "This year a new international organisation, the United Nations, has at last been founded. It has been set up on the initiative of the Anglo-Soviet-American coalition, which thereby assumes responsibility for the results of its future work.
>
> It is clear to us that the UN should not resemble the League of Nations, which proved impotent in the matter of resistance to aggression….the new organisation should not become the tool of any great power…Only the joint efforts of those powers which bore the burden of war and ensured the victory of the democratic countries over Fascism…can make for the success of the work of the new international organisation for a lasting peace."[67]

Soviet disillusionment with the UN was not long in coming. In early 1946 Moscow found itself under attack at the UN over delays in the postwar withdrawal of Soviet troops from Northern Iran. Gromyko walked out of a Security Council meeting in London in protest at the UN's interference in Soviet-Iranian bilateral relations. This proved to be the first of many such remonstrations and the inception of Gromyko's reputation as "Mr Nyet".

When the UN's newly appointed Secretary-General met Stalin in June 1946 the Soviet leader agreed with Trygve Lie[68] that the organisation's charter was not a bad document but

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[67] *Soviet News*, 8/11/45 pp.3-4.

[68] Contrary to Litvinov's suggestion in April 1944 the Secretaries-General of the UN are not directly nominated by the permanent members of the Security Council. They are appointed by the General Assembly upon recommendation of the Security Council, with each

complained the Americans had forgotten Roosevelt's wisdom that collaboration had to be based on the principle of unanimity not majorities and minorities. Lie responded that in his speeches he had defended the veto as the price small countries had to pay for peace and prosperity, Still, said Lie, the Soviets should use the veto with discretion. Of course, the veto should not be abused, replied Stalin, but what else did the British and Americans expect to happen if they used their majority in the UN to lord it over the Soviet Union?

The next time Lie met Stalin was May 1950 when he visited Moscow to lobby for a ten-point peace plan to break the cold war deadlock. While the Soviets liked some aspects of Lie's plan, such as regular meetings of the Security Council, the establishment of a UN army and the revival of disarmament and arms control negotiations, they were not keen on others, notably the proposed reduction of the power of veto. Molotov was no longer foreign minister (he had resigned in 1949 following his Jewish wife's arrest for pro-Zionist inclinations) but he attended the meeting and took the lead in the discussion with Lie. Stalin's main contribution was to urge the Secretary-General to stand up for the UN against those states which were trampling on its rights. The UN should support developing countries and defend small states, Stalin told Lie. When Lie pointed out that the United States controlled the UN's purse strings Stalin responded that if the UN resolutely stood up for its rights its status in the eyes of the peoples of the world would rise and it would receive both more money and respect.[69]

The timing of Lie's initiative could hardly have been worse. Jacob Malik, the Soviet representative on the Security Council, was boycotting its meetings in protest at the exclusion of communist China from the UN. In June 1950 North Korea invaded South Korea and Malik's absence from the Security Council enabled the western powers to pass a condemnatory motion which provided cover for an American-led military intervention in the conflict. Malik quickly returned to his seat to veto all such subsequent resolutions. The ensuing stalemate in the UN mirrored that which prevailed in the Korean War until the armistice of July 1953.

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permanent member being able to veto a recommendation. So far, no Secretary-General has been a citizen of a permanent member. Lie was Norwegian and his successor Swedish.

[69] "Dve Besedy I.V. Stalina s General'nym Sekretarem Organizatsii Ob'edninennykh Natsii Trugve Li", *Novaya i Noveishaya Istoriya*, no.3 2001 pp.104-116

Conclusion

The centrality of the Soviet role in the foundation of the United Nations was the result of long-term engagement with the idea of an international organisation of states dedicated to the maintenance of peace and security. While Soviets never embraced the liberal concept of world government - they had their own utopian idea of a world federation based on workers' power and class solidarity - they took seriously the practical utility of the League of Nations long before they became a member of the organisation.

Crucial was the post-revolutionary shift in Soviet foreign policy to seeking peaceful coexistence with the capitalist world, initially as a temporary tactic of survival and then as a long-term strategy for the spread of socialism. In that context Moscow saw the League as a means to promote the cause of disarmament and then, in the 1930s, as a framework for the pursuit of collective security.

The abysmal failure of the League and of the Soviets' own policy of collective security induced Stalin to pursue more conventional great power politics in the form of a spheres influence deal with Hitler. After the failure of the Nazi-Soviet pact the Soviets returned to the idea of collective security in the form of proposals for an international organisation that would institutionalise a concert of great powers imposing peace and security across the globe.

The security architecture of the newly created UN reflected that Soviet vision, but it lacked the necessary political basis. The grand alliance broke up after the war and the UN became a battleground of the cold war. Paradoxically, what kept the Soviet Union from leaving the organisation was the veto system, which was devised to foster great power unity but in practice became a mechanism used by all the permanent members to protect their vital interests from UN encroachments. This was a far cry from Soviet hopes and optimism in 1945. Yet the UN continues to exist and to play an important role in world politics, when its interests coincide with those of the great powers.